The larks are small songbirds of open country, especially rough grassland and undervelveted tundra. They have long legs and toes, and an especially long hold and claw. Their bill is usually stout, and they feed on small insects and seeds. Common European introduction

Aricia alpina

LAKES

76 species worldwide except South America: 1 has been introduced to New Zealand.

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SKY LARK

Alauda arvensis

Common European introduction

Alaudine is a mix of ornamental and songbirds. Although larks have erect crown feathers that can form a short crest, their plumage is otherwise dull to provide camouflage on the ground. The song is a beautiful torrent of trills and notes, often delivered while hovering high overhead.

SKY LARK

Alauda arvensis

Plate 67

SKY LARK

Alaudina arvensis

Size: 13 cm, 38 g
Distribution: Natural breeding range is Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and northern Asia; migrating south to India and northern Africa. At least 1000 birds were introduced into New Zealand by Acclimatisation Societies for sentimental reasons, and widely released between 1864 and 1875. They quickly became well estab-
lished and spread throughout the country.
The Skylark is very now common in all types of open country, such as sand dunes, farmland and tussock grassland, from North to Stewart Island and on offshore islands, from sea level to subalpine height. It is a fairly common breeder in all but the most arid parts and other thick stands of vegetation. They are common on the Chatham Islands and vagrants have been recorded in Kaikoura, Karamatura, the Straits, Antipodes, Auckland and Campbell Islands. In their natural range, most birds migrate southwards in winter, but in New Zealand most seem to be sedentary or make local movements to follow food. Some保姆s have been recorded from Stewart Island with Farewell Spit has been noted in late autumn.
Population: Widespread and locally abundant in open country, especially parts east of the Main Divide, in sand-dune country and on the Chathams.
Breeding: Some pairs remain on territory all year and breed together year after year. Other birds, perhaps mainly juveniles, form loose flocks in autumn and winter. Singing by males increases from May, but song is not loud until September, during which pairs may lay 2-3 clutches. The females build the nest and then lays 2-3 4-5 eggs (23 x 17 mm), greyish white to creamy buff, thickly speckled brown, frequently with a darker zone at the broader end. The nest is a neat grass-lined cup in a small depression in the ground, especially a hoofprint, and often contoured by an overhanging chink of grass, rush or tuft. The female alone incubates for 14 days, but both parents feed the nestlings, which leave the nest at about 6-7 days old, but do not fly until c. 20 days old. Young breed at about 1 year old. Few birds have been banded in New Zealand, but in Europe a Skylark lived at least 8 years.
Behaviour: Pairs are strongly territorial during the breeding season, but some form winter flocks and pairs migrate within New Zealand. The territorial song of the male, heard mainly in August and January, is a rapid series of notes ending in a Lark song, with a bar at the end in May-June. In May-June, the song is a continuous, thick, harsh, Hispering song. They occasionally sing from a post or on the ground. The call note is a liquid 'chrip', often given in flight.
Feeding: Diet mainly seeds of grasses, cereals, weeds, clover, grass and other plants, supplemented with moderate quantities of inver-

table feeding birds, such as bees, flies, spiders, bugs and larvae of flies, beetles and moths. All food is taken from the ground. Skylarks can cause considerable economic damage to crops by eating grain seed and grasses, and by pulling out or defoliating seedlings of tomatoes, cabbages, wheat and peas.